

## DR. JOHN W. FRANCIS

The Ursa Major (the late Dr. Francis) is entitled to our first attention, not only from the prominence of his position as the late President of the Academy of Medicine, but from that uniform kindness and excellence of heart that make him beloved wherever he is known. Should the doctor think we are taking an odd method of proving our esteem by exposing some of his innocent peculiarities, we can only assure him that he pays the forfeit of his irresistible drollery. Like the Laplander, who proves "by thumps upon your back how he esteems your merit," or the grizzly bear himself, who gives you perhaps a gentle hug, and then quits you for more enticing game, we are only following out our nature; a laughing philosopher is our admiration, and we honestly believe a chat with our bear, even at the risk of a hug, is worth all the physic in his wallet. Let us attempt a sketch as we first saw him in the very zenith of his reputation, when old Rutgers College—our venerable Alma Mater in Duane Street—was in full blast, making doctors by the hundred, its guns manned with Mott, Bushe, Hosack, Macnevin, the Ursa Major, and Griscom, and firing away at the old battery in Barclay Street.

Five feet seven or eight inches; figure well set and of equal dimensions; glorious forehead; massive nose, denoting great generosity and intellectual vigor; large grey eyes, covered with gold spectacles; powerful and sensual mouth, showing a high degree of animal life, and a perfect ability to appreciate good cheer; hair grizzled, and radiating from the forehead, whence, and likewise from some other peculiarities, the name, Ursa Major.

Scene first: Dr. Bushe and Dr. Francis alternately officiating in examining the students. Thirty pupils present—ourselves entering very late; the professor examining the class. On opening the door, and entering, an awful look through the glasses—"Mr. D———, who discovered the thoracic duct?" Answer, "Pecquet"; and, in a louder voice—"Who discovered the lacteals?" (See our article on Purgatives.) Answer, "Assellius." Professor (*sotto voce*, yet loud enough to be heard all over the room:) "The devil! Professor Porson the second!" No more questions to us at that time; if there had been, we should have been shorn of our honors; for it so happened we were just from an

indolent loll over our classical dictionary, where all the doings of the defunct worthies were posted up. The questioning was continued where it was left off on our entrance, with a southern pupil, and we had leisure to make our observations on our friend. It was soon evident that nature had given him a temperament equal to his body, and Caliban himself might have envied him that. Glancing his eye over his spectacles anon on this side and that, like a buffalo chafed by the hunter, he seemed every moment ready to gore some unfortunate wight who should fail to answer; yet believe us, reader, this peculiar manner covered a heart full of the warmest and kindest sympathy, and a head replete with knowledge. Alas; none can know how much there is to produce a repulsive manner, in a man whose thoughts are occupied with far other things than the foolish questions of the ill-educated student, or nervous invalid. No man was ever more attentive to his patient, none had a readier word of sympathy, a kindlier jest, or a more side-splitting anecdote, than the Ursa Major; and none more willingly relieved the pecuniary wants of a patient, and that in a manner so full of the milk of human kindness and gentleness, that the donor always managed to leave the obligation on his side.

Our next interview was in the library; the doctor was indulging in his favorite beverage of green tea, and regalias, puffing and sipping away with infinite relish, and we were immersed in the quaint writings of some antiquated old quid, when a thundering rap announced a visitor. Starting from his seat, the professor sprang into the middle of the floor, and was soon clasped in the arms of the Phenomenon!—that wonderful little gentleman had just arrived from Paris, dressed in the latest extreme, filled with all the knowledge of the French capital, and puffing and blowing like a speckled frog. Then began a scene we shall never forget. The professor, always ready for sport, actually spinning round on his feet as on a pivot, with the body of the Phenomenon grasped tightly to his massive chest, and the legs of the little man making a radius as they flew round, while the words, half smothered, ever and anon found vent—“Oh! my dear Doctor F———! mon cher Paris! Dupuytren! Lisfranc! Boyer! Roux! Larrey! and all the glorious constellation of worthies! Dear Doctor F———, I will tell you all, only give me time. You know nothing—you can know nothing. They know everything. Old things are done away, and all things are become new. Oh! mon cher Paris!” Thus the little man continued raving, alter-

nately extending his arms toward "mon cher Paris," and looking round upon the Ursa Major's elegant library with infinite contempt, assuring him in the most amiable manner it was all trash, and advising him at once to sell out, and go to Paris. It is impossible to convey the expression of the doctor's countenance at this rhapsody! It actually outdid himself, as we subsequently learned—though that is saying a great deal, for the doctor is high pressure even yet, and the scene we describe is thirty years ago. He seemed to enjoy it hugely. After half an hour's quizzing as he only could quiz, the professor accompanied the Phenomenon to the front door, and returned to the library with an expression of countenance exquisitely comical. He drew up in front of the glass, and addressed his reflection with infinite gravity, and in a stentorian voice, utterly regardless of our presence—"Dr. F———, you poor, old, miserable devil! sell out your traps, and all your musty old books; go to Paris—and drink at the fountain of knowledge till your soul is slaked with the divine influence. For shame, you poor miserable old wretch, to sit here, while the very effulgence of science irradiates—mon cher Paris! (mimicking the Phenomenon)—and a stray comet has shot off from the glorious constellation and alighted in this benighted hemisphere," etc. All who know the professor's gift, or have seen him on his high horse, will appreciate the style in which he went over this rhapsody. Then turning to us with great seriousness, and looking over his spectacles, assured us we enjoyed in his office a fine opportunity to study the various temperaments, and advised us to neglect no opportunity of improving ourselves in that necessary professional accomplishment.

It was not long before we found out the many peculiarities of our kind preceptor, and learned to appreciate his excellent heart. We will relate some more of them at a future time. The Ursa Major has a keen perception of the ludicrous, and an exquisite ability to enjoy humor. Dean Swift never said better things than we have heard from his lips again and again; he is indeed a fine example of the old school; long may he enjoy the reputation for learning, wit, and benevolence he so well deserves, not forgetting his green tea and cigar.

Dixon, Edward H.: *Back-Bone*.  
New York, De Witt, 1866, pp. 178-82.